2.1 The Holiday Inn

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**Goya at the Holiday Inn.** Goya checks in and is irritated to see modern art and photography, doubles and parasites both, waiting at the desk. These hollow heads will conspire and ensure that, later on, it will be said with confidence that we know Goya, that he is common knowledge, just like we know and imagine war. We will empathize, fill his shoes, like Will Graham, profiler and hunter of psychopaths in NBC’s *Hannibal*: ‘This is my design’. Goya’s *Disasters of War* (*Los Desastres de la Guerra*) will be contained, encrypted in the tradition and rhetoric we will, with hindsight, say he spawned. We will endlessly recycle these images. In them, we will see, as retrojected origin, the immediacy and directness of the war photographer, the clarity of the modern, critical eye undistracted by ornament. And we will see Jake and Dinos Goya repeat them in their noise and excess, as ambivalence and psychosis. Goya’s restitution as demonic clown-king, furious forked entity, everywhere at once: I’m raping, I’m rending, castrating, crucifying. Meanwhile, Goya is bonkers in the bar, on a bender, entered and possessed by his legacy. These other Goyas, future Goyas, they’ve gagged him, blinded him and with so much work to do. Everything is the wrong way round! *I saw it.* Did I see it? Art and photography struggle into their flak jackets, and rush to catch up with him as he leaves the hotel in a flap. They already know that before his prints will be published, the camera will have been invented and will have premediated his foundational achievement, his decisive moment. Already, the unholy trinity hangs from the tree in Plate 39, assembled from mannequins, broken action men. Down shelled streets, Goya rushes or is pushed towards his inhuman end, Ligotti’s puppet master defecting to the other side, to the ‘secret too terrible to know’. Goya, the first, the ‘Black Source’ — just a puppet, just a drone!

**Battle scarred.** The war room at the Holiday Inn. All the big name, big gun photojournalists are here. Their noses twitch, but there’s no scent, no trail. For the moment, they can do nothing but wait. Wait,

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drink hard liquor, smoke up a storm, practice their thousand-yard stare. Some of them — the freelancers, greenhorns without agency or newspaper sponsor — can’t afford to stay here, but they stick to the sides, to the walls, hunting for lucky breaks. You need to start out naïve so that you can end up haunted. They know how it works. That’s how you become damaged goods, that’s how you get the look. The veterans in the room are self-consciously craggy, performatively pock marked like shrapnel damaged buildings, flamboyantly track marked like junkies living on the foil of war, mainlining the misery of human conflict. In the centre of the room’s fug, Don McCullin and Robert King compare the talismanic cameras that hang from their necks. The best shot is the one that nearly kills you, but you need the right aura. In low tones, they each summon the apotropaic powers of their respective machine. Flak-magic. McCullin runs a gnarled finger across the dented pentaprism of his Nikon F, moving slowly down to the misshapen metal around the winder crank handle. This, an index of war, is ‘the perfect imprint of an AK-47 round.’ It embalms the instant, it is a matter of fact, contiguous with the truth. Undeterred, King conjures memorized trajectories through the air: a bullet lodged in the headrest of a car, a bullet that gives him a hot kiss on the ass, a bullet that lodges in his betacam. ‘This bullet went through this camera’, he murmurs. And, once again from the top, ‘that’s a Sony for you.’ The wounded camera is reality correspondent — it corresponds, as Peirce put it, ‘point by point to nature’, to the syntax of the battle.²

Young man face scream. What can the war photographer do? What few affects define it in the vast forest of the warzone, pull all its organs and functions into being? Which prerecorded images does it use to synchronize itself with the world, singularize the rhythms of those invisible forces resonating in its body? Well, there is a stock photography of war, about war, enslaved to certain triggers. Start

somewhere stupid: ‘Young man face scream — war conception’. This is the title of a stock photo accessible online at 123rf.com. A screaming man in a black t-shirt stands against a white background upon which crudely drawn fighter planes let loose their guns, bullets throwing up earth as they hit the ground behind him (‘Similar’ stock photos on offer on the same page include ‘dangerous sniper with the rifle’, ‘young beautiful woman in t-shirt’, ‘close-up portrait of serious lady’ and ‘fashion young businessman black suit against dark background’). A simple scheme: War conception — spectacle of the horror, oh the inhumanity. Result — face scream. What are the options? To see and to document the horror that is seen. To compose, in an image, the effects produced by the forces of war. But — beyond the document, beyond effects — what of the forces themselves, invisible as they are; what of the violence that exceeds its spectacle? Deleuze lauded Francis Bacon for his response to this question. In a world conceived as unending war, unending suffering, insofar as it is conceived in terms of the bombardment of bodies by inhuman forces — and, as such, imperceptible, insensible and unliveable forces — the technical problem is to intimate the ‘zone of indiscernibility’ which the body becomes. Bacon immobilizes the body, the head, so that forces will not be registered only in the movements they effect. Bacon’s heads are scrubbed, swept and smeared — convulsed and deformed in sensation but not transformed. Not transformed because they resolve into no specific form. To render sensation is to render the fury of force. These are heads thrust into the middle, between man and animal, human and inhuman. In them, faces are shrugged off and the meat swarms furiously. Such heads are way stations on the impossible path to the invisible. This is the art of the scream, in which the screamer ‘cannot see...has nothing left to see’. Spectacle is to be ‘scrambled’, because in it forces must always remain invisible; in a combative ‘act of vital faith’, Bacon renounces spectacle for sensation. In this sense, to scream is to believe, not to see. Only then can a force be released which ‘flushes out’ and confronts the forces embattling the body on their own terms. So much for the man who painted those dreadful pictures. But what of photography? Must
photography relinquish belief? Is photography always too late to the war?³

**The frontest front line.** The front line is the line of objective truth, the line at which history is encountered as it first unfolds. Real human experience, real people. In a short film produced for *The Times* promoting McCullin’s return to war, the aged photographer is seen plodding through devastated Aleppo streets. Seventy-seven years old, he’s had a bypass operation, a stroke, but he’s back to where the bullets are flying, back to the zone demarcated from every other zone, back to the discrete world of war, separate to all other worlds. He wanted a mission, and for his sins they gave him one. At first, he’s like a kid at Christmas — gleefully crossing over the border, eager to lend words of advice to young freelancers. This is the real thing, with none of the cozy but blinkered restrictions of embedment: no ‘strategic communications’ directed by Central Command, no indemnification releases, no escort. Almost immediately, though, McCullin’s project stalls, his camera falters. It happens late in the afternoon when returning to the abandoned government building that rebels have made their base of operations. As his car travels through what remains of an avenue of trees, McCullin leans his head against the window, closing his eyes against the sun. Without warning, he is overcome by an intense surge of kaleidoscopic colours and complex patterns that burst behind his eyelids. A frenetic slide projector pulses out abstract images, flickering in polychromatic HP5, vibrantly colourized Tri-X. As the car makes it way out of the avenue, the power of this vision ends as abruptly as it had begun. In the days that follow this penetrating but unexplained occurrence, the front line seems somehow to lose its specificity, its power to communicate. For McCullin, the world of documentary realism is revealed as a dreamscape, a world of real fictions — real, just not yet actualized, virtual forces that condition and aestheticize all forms of communication. It is, he says, ‘very, very bizarre, very strange…like being in a Fellini film.’ Stricken with photographer’s block, McCullin’s images now seem nothing more

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\textbf{Venus or something.} D’you know what the man’s saying? Do you? This is dialectics. It’s very simple dialectics — one through nine, no maybe no supposes no fractions. You can’t travel in space, you can’t go out into space y’know without like y’know... er, with fractions. What are you gonna land on, one quarter? Three eighths? What are you gonna do when you go from here to Venus or something? That’s dialectic physics, okay? Dialectic logic is, there’s only love and hate. You either love someone, or you hate ’em. So says Dennis Hopper’s far out photographer, festooned with cameras, too long in the jungle. William Burroughs, less festooned but further out, identifies Venus as home to the power he named Control. In 1968 he made contact with this entity, through the rather unsatisfactory offices of Willy Deiches and Brenda Dunks, two ex-IBM employees become Nova agents, residents of Fulham Road, London. For a fee of 12 shillings per question, Deiches and Dunks submitted Burroughs’s questions to Control via computer-assisted link involving newspaper cuttings and various mysterious procedures. Interpreting the responses, Burroughs became sceptical — why would Control answer? Well, perhaps Control plays ball to discover what you know, what you give away in your questioning. In any case, whatever the value this polite Q&A, this genteel messaging to and fro, might have had in 1968, it must certainly be a redundant form of communication.
today, when Control has passed fully into the vector, into the middle, preempting the temporality of the message. The power of Control, it seems, is not dialectical but ecological, processual. It is, then, necessary to find weapons appropriate to the war, to confront Control on its own terms. Old dualisms won’t help us here. Communication must instead take the form of experiments with non-dialectical difference, a difference that is not separate to an other, but flickering parts of a single substance, a single unstable Real.

_Secreted like beetles_. 1993, Sarajevo. Robert King, fool in fatigues, is hovering again like an embarrassing fart in the foyer of the Holiday Inn. He catches a glimpse of Sontag — fed up of just _witnessing_, for Christ’s sake — discussing her plans for staging a production of _Waiting for Godot_ in the city (‘something that would exist only in Sarajevo…No longer can a writer consider that the imperative task is to bring the news to the outside world. The news is out’). King doesn’t feel Lucky at the moment, even though he’s the star of his own film. He wants to be on the _inside_ of this scene, goddamn, but he can’t get a room. What a romantic. What an insect. ‘Why’, asked Robert Fisk, same time, same place, ‘have so many of us written so many words about these often grubby hotels when epic tragedies outside their doors should have made such reports both tasteless and inappropriate?’ Answering himself, he moralizes ‘by doing so, we help to romanticise ourselves’. The real world lies beyond the foyer while the press stay inside, ‘secreted like beetles’. But, really, today, the world has dismantled the walls and _vectoralized_ the hotel, like the torrent of blood bursting through elevator doors in Kubrick’s _The Shining_. It’s the same ‘space’, no difference. Here is the front line, blood trailed deep inside the complex, and here is the secret meaning of what will come to be called ‘embedment’. In embedment, the world explodes the logic of the ‘assignment’. Roger Caillois’ remarkable thesis on animal mimicry and crypsis is that it is no strategic camouflage oriented towards a dog-eat-dog reality but rather that the organism is fascinated, seduced and _trapped_ by its environment, victim to the

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5 Brion Gysin and William S Burroughs, ‘Control…Control?’ in Gysin, _Here to Go_, 215–29; Deleuze and Guattari, _A Thousand Plateaus_, 23.
'veritable lure' of 'dark space'. The background — penetrative and engulfing — assimilates the animal and not vice versa: ‘Space’, says Caillois, ‘seems to constitute a will to devour. Space chases, entraps, and digests [organisms] in a huge process of phagocytosis. Then, it ultimately takes their place’. In sinking into the epic tragedy of media matter, the cryptic is drained of independent life: ‘I am referring, so to speak, to the inertia of the elan vital’. Embedment is essentially a counterinsurgent practice through which the third estate’s ‘insurgency’ is weaponized against itself. All populating this environment are reassigned as puppets because their affective capacities get immediately conscripted into the drama and battlefield of a sublime, oceanic force of mediation: ‘So’, as J.G. Ballard comments, ‘you got this kind of drowned world where we all suddenly become rather silent aquatic creatures floating in this space, unaware of the direction of the current that was carrying us along’. King’s failure to drown, to float convincingly, is in fact his principle virtue. Blast McCullin. Bless Shooting Robert King.6

The Hunger. In contemporary media ecologies, we succumb and volunteer ourselves to a theatre of operations in which our role is input and output. In this Cailloisian space, there is a terrifying proximity and indistinction of everything, precipitated by the fractalization and informationalization of the self in ‘immanent promiscuity’. The romanticized reality film of the war photographer seeds the everyday banality of the social media user: ‘Each new user,’ William Merrin comments, ‘confident in their control as they construct and daily manipulate their promotional self, is, like Caillois’s insects, caught by its own spell, trapped by their own incantation’. From 1935–36 (coinciding with Caillois’ mimicry essay), Max Ernst produced several

paintings entitled ‘Garden Aeroplane Trap’ (*Jardin gobe-avions*). Inspired by C.J. Kresz’s 1820 treatise on bird-trapping techniques, Ernst speculated on the strange fate of transcendent aerial power, death from above neutralized by odd artificial landscapes, garden-like angular wooden boxes or stone terraces. Aeroplanes — more like woefully twisted planes folded in paper by children than sophisticated killing machines — appear to have been subject to the encroachment of a peculiar natural menace, a nature which itself is transformed by the contact. Sprouting from them, or engulfing them, are colourful plant-like excrescences, sinister bouquets, occasionally resembling fly-traps, crustaceans or insectile forms. Here is a mutual engulfment or interpenetration in process, a collision of natures. As Ernst himself comments, here are ‘voracious gardens in turn devoured by a vegetation that springs from the debris of trapped airplanes’. Or, in Jeanette Baxter’s words, ‘the organic devours the inorganic which devours the organic’. Here is an inhuman, chaotic, hungry space, a mediatic space of possibility for weird, irruptive events awaiting their pre-photographic stabilization (these are gardens, if weird gardens). It is though in the after-image of such an event — in which a multiplicity of connectings and transformative devourings are briefly subject to a strange kind of illumination — that we might catch a glimpse of its vectoral contours.7

**Ugly pictures.** Robert King’s room at the Holiday Inn. McCullin and Goya have just left, the three of them having spent the day ritualistically drinking Martell Cordon Bleu, smashing mirrors, and — stripped down to their underwear — weeping, with extreme prejudice. The room is now littered with empty bottles, makeshift ashtrays overflow, a burnt odour drifts from the en suite. Ensconced in this grime, King is hunched over a small portable television on which, amidst considerable static, Michael Parkinson (doyen of British talkshow hosts) interviews the war photographer William

S Burroughs. The television signal is intermittent and occasionally drops out entirely, so King is forced to continually adjust the coat hanger that stands in for an aerial. In tight close up, made closer still by King’s proximity to the bulbous screen, Burroughs ignores Parky’s sycophantic line of questioning and addresses the camera directly: You think you know what death is, Robert Oppenheimer... you think you are death, but you don’t know death, you Ugly American shit. Not until you’ve seen the pictures. It’s complicated is what it is. Death is your crash landing. WHEEEEEE... BLINDING FLASH. That’s when your death shows itself... look around. It’s gray, like newsprint. That flash, that crash, that was the Old Photographer right there, working for the control machine. Here it is, I wrote it: ‘He knows that DEATH is the picture of Death. Of your death. This is proved by the fact that there is somebody there to take the picture. Show someone the picture of his death and you kill him. Fear is the pictures of your fear’. In a newspaper, it’ll kill you, kill hundreds — terrible accidents, crashes, a fire here and there, a school shooting. It’s an old, old trick — seen it a hundred times. Done it a few times myself, actually. Here are the editors: ‘Go out and get the pictures. The ugly pictures. If you can’t find them make them’. I know newspapers... I know editors, Ugly Americans, old photographers, they’re all instruments of Control. All pictures are war pictures. See, me, I don’t work for Control. Not from around here. An intrusion is what I am. Got a different kind of focus. Gather round, see this scrapbook... Like to see where this goes? Intersect with these coordinates? Now, listen for the click... King’s tense grip on the aerial momentarily tremors and Burroughs is immediately replaced with noise.\(^8\)

**Embedded.** Later, King assembles documents that he believes might constitute a photographic weapon. Kneeling on the floor in the centre of the room, he arranges images torn from old magazines, advertisements and brochures: (1) photograph of Hitler’s bathtub; (2) poster of James Woods as Richard Boyle in El Salvador; (3) nomenclature of Canon F-1; (4) photograph of a blast furnace in Mag-

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nitogorsk; (5) photograph of glamorous women in black fire masks at the entrance to an air raid shelter; (6) reproduction of an image from Max Ernst’s ‘Garden Aeroplane Trap’ series; (7) photograph of a car accident, New York, 1965; (8) poster of Nick Nolte as Russell Price in Nicaragua; (9) nomenclature of Nikon F2 and MD-2 motor drive; (10) panorama of Yosemite Valley. King has no interest in how these image documents might be interpreted. He has come to realize that they do not add up to anything fixed or comprehensive but act instead as a collision of interrelated processes and patterns, throwing open a series of potentials, the vectoral energies of which might be exploited according to different, wholly oppositional, trajectories.

**More elegance.** After the correspondents had prepared the city for its liberation, Miller had received a telegram from Vogue with a new assignment. She was to document the reemergence of haute couture, cover the signs of a new season as it springs forth. Glamour from the ruins, that kind of thing. Her initial efforts had been met with a less than enthusiastic response. **MORE ELEGANCE,** instructed a second telegram from the magazine’s editor. The world is waiting to see what the city will produce post-oppression. Photograph the new collections, the openings that open onto a post-war world. Irritated at these instructions from London, Miller had concluded that her editor had little idea what was happening at the front line — the London office didn’t seem to understand that the war is far from over. Miller had, though, picked up on rumours of a show embedded within the war itself, a show of real elegance. Though she hadn’t heard from him in weeks, she had become convinced that her lover, the British surrealist and *camoufleur,* Roland Penrose, was behind this new collection. Following the collapse of the Industrial Camouflage Research Unit, the company he had established with a group of fellow artists at the outbreak of war, Penrose had taken on a lecturing role for the War Office, teaching the theory and practice of camouflage to the Home Guard. To demonstrate camouflage in action, the slides for his lectures would often include an image of Miller lying naked on the lawn, covered in green paint and netting. Training in the strategic use of colour and texture, obliterative shading, disruptive patterns, and the elimination of cast shadows can ‘teach a man how to control
his tone’, he often said. Penrose’s lectures did not simply address concealment though, they also dealt with deception, misdirection and bluff. In this, he turned to ‘nature as a guide’, to the natural strategies of deceptive markings, deceptive behaviour. As a committed painter, he had in the past shown little interest in photography, but in his recent letters Penrose had increasingly fixated on Caillois’s assertion that morphological mimicry is ‘genuine photography…photography of shape and relief, on the order of objects and not of images’. The show was not difficult for Miller to track down. Following a few enquiries with her contacts at various fashion houses, she was escorted to the show’s front line in the hills surrounding the Holiday Inn. It seemed the collection was designed to be viewed from a distance: high off the ground, and through a telephoto lens or telescopic sight. Miller climbed into the imitation tree provided as observation post and shinnied her way to the top where the extended focal length of her lens picked out the catwalk — a rough clearing in the distance. For a while she could see only the obvious decoys: the dummy photographers crouched in the scrub wearing dummy flak jackets holding dummy cameras lodged with dummy bullets. Aside from these static forms, the show’s models appeared to be embedded to the point of disappearance. The catwalk was empty. And then, gradually, as the hours passed, Miller began to perceive the vague outline of familiar forms and faces shuttling along its length: McCullin, King, Goya, three-dimensional reproductions, sculpture photographs.  

**Crossroads.** Beneath tattered clouds, beneath the moon, Don strode into the clearing and stood at the crossroads. How legends are born, how they live — an offering is made. You’re supposed to bury something. If you bury a suicide or a criminal at such a place, you can make a zombie. For instance. Don thinks, paces a while. Empties his pockets. In the end, Don buries himself, sort of. He buries his past. To be reborn to a new kind of assignment. Reborn to the war.

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Reborn to the middle of everything. And he will stand there, he will look around. He will see, he will not look away and he will believe. How a legend is born. Strike a deal. Go back into the forest and take the shots. Legendary, ugly shots. Double-page spreads. Covers.

**Be the war.** ‘Be the change you want to see in the world’, Gandhi said. But Don wanted to *be the war*. Exercising his magic powers: ‘This may sound ridiculous’, Don says, ‘but I know that I have a perception of coincidences which has allowed me to get close to certain situations and come away alive’. And how exactly did you come by these skills, Mr. McCullin?¹⁰

**A split second.** First of all, he would dip in, get his shots and then, he would run! Run like the wind, thinking ‘Got it! Got it!’ But it wasn’t enough — he began to need to stay. You couldn’t really take anything away. The point was *being* there. You cannot disrupt an act of true worship. Longer and longer. Weeks, even. Till even the warriors started thinking, ‘What the fuck?’ It was out of time, whether the Congo, ’Nam, Cambodia, El Salvador, the Lebanon, just out of history. All one war, one universe. One landscape. And, then later, everything remains so clear, every detail, like the individual leaves of a tree or droplets of a river. Don remembers every little fragment, crystalline, every shutter speed and aperture.¹¹

**Free-shooter.** In 1990, Burroughs collaborated with Robert Wilson and Tom Waits in the production of *The Black Rider*, a stage musical based on a German folktale of the supernatural, *Der Freischütz*. Burroughs wrote the libretto and, talking guns with pals at his home in Kansas in the year of its premiere, he explicitly connects the project to his conception of the ‘war universe’. What is the war universe? It’s the only game in town — ceaseless hostilities between an unseen ad-
versary — an invasive force, an Ugly Spirit — and all the forces you can muster. Everything hinges on drawing out the Ugly Spirit, rendering him visible, because his powers hinge on obscurity. He thrives in fog. And where do you find him? Always between worlds, at the crossroads, at the intersection. He’ll show himself for sure because he’s always more than ready to make a deal. How does Burroughs’s libretto relate to this? A file clerk, looking to step up to the mark and win his lady love, is compelled to prove himself as a hunter but can’t shoot for shit. The only way to do it? He has to go down to the forest, find some lonely crossroads and enter a pact with something real ugly. Once in the forest, the magic bullets he’s granted seem to fulfil his wishes — can’t miss — but you know only the first few shots are free. It’s him being triggered, and, when it counts, he can’t pull away. Addiction, that’s the real deal. Take the shot, destroy the reason you did it all for in the first place, and you’re delivered right back to the Ugly Spirit. Any deal you make at the crossroads — you pay it all back, none of it was ever really yours. Hit the mark, hit the dark. That’s the thing about skills of the middle — no such thing as free-shooting. The trick, Burroughs tells his pals, is to know your fate. Name your horror. It’s all there, at the intersection. It’s where everything is written, edited, spliced. Pay attention, watch it happen. You may make a difference, you may force a change, but you’ve got to know how things happen. Ports of entry accessed only by getting out of the way of yourself."

‘Endarkenment’. This is the story a Legend tells itself in the small hours: It was a gay old time, but it had to end. Don, febrile, turned his back on the luminous darkness of the Holiday Inn, the amphitheatre of war. Somerset beckoned, with all its trees and its flowers, its springs and its summers — healing had to happen. But England called him back for judgement, for the trial and the sentence awaiting him. In his body’s cloaca, the darkness and the fever hitched a ride. Noisy ghosts installed in the filing cabinet. ‘Sometimes it felt like I was carrying pieces of human flesh back home with me, not nega-

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tives. It’s as if you are carrying the suffering of the people you have photographed. One in the morning, always that time, waking in a cold sweat from nightmares of imprisonment, beatings, old wounds itching. Where once his mission was to be unflinching, absolutely non-moral — straddle the forcefield and make with the vectoral magic, take the pictures-from-which-one-must-not-look-away — now all he seems to do is flinch, dwell on the moral, dwell on the guilt. A gunshot rings out like a bell — who hunts in the middle of the night? Photography isn’t anything to do with looking or seeing. It’s a feeling, the kind of feeling you can never shake. If your business is this kind of photography it’s a stew in which you’re always going to cook. The feeling that endures is the tearing of the bullet, the bullet with your name on it, that one your camera took instead of your face. The bullet that was your final press pass — to the battlefield of your soul. Final cover story — the Legend is driven mad. The fly twitches in the web. Operation Wandering Soul lifted out of ‘Nam and brought home to Avalon. Portable darkness. Don came back to heal, but has found only winter, only chill, only the ghost of coincidence past. ‘This may sound ridiculous...’ Only Goya corralling the other larvae in the furthest rooms of his home, rattling through the negatives, scattering the butchered flesh, the instruments of a surgery of coincidence. At home, he was always the evacuee. A peace sentence. Photography always leaves you in the dark.13

Ceasefire. The bar in the Holiday Inn. Goya sits with the television crew that has been listlessly following him around these past weeks. They continue to await his miserable war stories. Tales of Saragossa. Memories of Napoleon. Summary executions. Assaults on the body. Something. Anything. Yet Goya remains silent. Miller, the director of the crew, tries to suppress her growing frustration. After days of nothing but desultory wandering, the subject of her programme has still yet to come up with the goods. And now that fighting has moved to within one block of the hotel, she knows that the city’s ever more abstract geography of bombed out department stores and apartments, its shattered offices and banks, will provide an ideal

13 Morris, McCullin.
backdrop to Goya’s delirious inventory of atrocities. If only her star would communicate.

**Misfire.** Darkness. A black tomb, a black box. Hidden down here, a decomposing corpse lies on its side. Rather than acting simply as a symbol of man’s inhumanity to man, this corpse is raising itself up in a final act of speechless communication. In its hand the corpse clutches a sign on which is written ‘Nada.’ Threatening faces leer in the shadows. *Nada, or Nothing,* was the original caption Goya gave to this image, Plate 69 of his *Disasters of War.* The words ‘Ello dirá’ (which can be translated as ‘Time will tell’, or ‘We shall see’) were posthumously added to the caption at the time of its publication. As Juliet Wilson-Bareau describes it, the original title was simply too nihilistic, too pessimistic, for the Academy which first published the work, and the institution felt obliged to give the image a marginal sense of hope, an affirmative spin. Nada is something negative, an absence, and last words should point to form not void. In Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness,* Marlow saves Kurtz’s wife the trauma of recounting the words that so haunt him — ‘The horror! The horror!’ — by saying that it was her name choked in her husband’s last breath. Life can’t end on a downer, a sigh, with the ‘lethargy of discontent.’ The void, the inaccessible, must remain just that. Even Rustin Cohle, one time cosmic pessimist of HBO’s *True Detective,* ends up Enlightened by comparison: ‘once there was only dark. You ask me, the light’s winning.’ The void is reduced to familiar form, communication triumphs. It’s not the lack of form, of order, it’s just that we haven’t recognized it yet. Too complex, y’see. But what if the philosophical negativeness of Nada, the failure or refusal to take on any form at all, was generative in itself? What if there was a mode of mediation through which it became possible to communicate with ‘that which is, by definition, inaccessible.’ Not to represent, not to reduce to something familiar, but, as Eugene Thacker has it, to communicate ‘inaccessibility in and of itself.’ What if there was something other than communication as we know it, something other to the repressive control of communication’s circuit, to its cycle of production? What if, to quote Deleuze, there were ‘circuit breakers, so that we can elude control’? Photography, a matter of endarkenment rather than
Enlightenment, possesses a weird intimacy with forces that remain voided. Nada is the pessimistic function of photography, a sorrow at the form of communication itself. Nada: ‘the right to say nothing.’

**Arcanum of the Exploded Camera.** Nada is also the nomadic hero of John Carpenter’s *They Live*, the nothing who stumbles, through a lens darkly, over the alien conspiracy which controls the population of Los Angeles, perhaps the world, by means of subliminal media messages: ‘They are safe as long as they are not discovered. That is their primary method of survival. Keep us asleep, keep us selfish, keep us sedated.’ Only ye who are lost, ye of little consequence, nothing to say, nowhere to go, ye who intrude and who irritate, may don the dark glass and see, see to dismantle the faces and pry out the teeming alien rhizome. This, our Tarot of the Dark Glass, Arcanum of the Exploded Camera: Muybridge the Magician, Goya the Hanged Man, McCullin the Devil, King the Fool, Miller the Empress, Burroughs without Name.

**Nature trail.** For the forester, von Uexküll says, the oak tree is a ‘few cords of wood’. For the little girl, the tree has a ‘danger tone’, thronging as it is with vile gnomes. For the fox, owl or squirrel harboured in its bole and branches, the tree sounds a ‘protection’ or ‘supporting’ tone. The ant perceives only the bark which is its hunting ground. What does the legendary devil, McCullin, perceive of the tree and the forest? Of what miracles of affect do his sensory instruments consist? Or maybe it’s simple, perhaps only a few affects, like the tick or the fly? ‘Nothing but a few signs like stars in an immense black night’. A light sleeper, he waits in his room in the Holiday Inn like

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the tick waiting on the end of its high twig for the sweet scent of a passing mammal’s sweat, the warmth of blood. The tick lives to drop and burrow, for the sweat, flesh and blood of it all. The snout of the photographer-tick, for its part, is twitching with the sweat of fear…anticipative, sensing a decisive moment in the offing, imagining — feeling — the intersections of a magical web of coincidence. The tick can wait on its twig for decades — shuts down, nothing doing — but McCullin is a faster animal, feeding twice a year. Two wars a year. McCullin, tugging on his flak jacket, is really ‘McCullin’, the signature, sprayed around the perimeters of a warzone. The McCullin sensorium is co-constituted with the warzone, embedded, burrowing. McCullin and his war become together, each harbours the other’s otherness, the likeness of the other. McCullin has the tone, the image of the zone, painted inside his nervous system. McCullin is a tone, a singularization of tone, a biologic film which expresses a tribe, a photoist operation which is a kind of surgery, a kind of cutting — coincidence butchery, intersection art, crossroads voodoo. Photography will not renounce its share of the violence. A thread of blood, circling, patrolling these pre-haunted and pre-damned images, all down the long, long years from Goya. A Collection of Dead Men. This is Bad. This is the Truth. Nada. Nada Truth. The hazard of war photoism is the bullet lodged in the camera, the exploded camera, the camera which breaks with the blood trail, like third nature breaks with second, to experiment with affects, composing a new kind of music. Music of the vector. The camera which sees nothing and believes it. Music of sighs and screams. Opening line of Waiting for Godot: ‘Nothing to be done.’ The sun is high, blazing through clouds of dust which stir in the breeze, the warrior’s hand releases the grenade, the bullet is on its way, Don clicks, stops time, time starts, grenade, bullet and flesh crash together, nature is screaming, crying, suffering, Don stalks it, takes it, takes it. Style, singularization, haecceity, the crystal of the Holiday Inn. The tick’s trick.15

A typical world city. In Ballard’s short story, ‘War Fever’, Beirut is a designed experience, engineered and modulated: ‘Everything, even the McDonald’s. The UN architects designed it as a typical world city — a Hilton, a Holiday Inn, a sports stadium, shopping malls. They brought in orphaned teenagers from all over the world, from every race and nationality. To begin with we had to prime the pump — the NCOs and officers were all UN observers fighting in disguise. But once the engine began to turn, it ran with very little help’. This is the city as alchemy of aggression, as ‘war laboratory’, in which war is instigated and contained as an affective virus, a phenomenon of belief, constantly mutating. The city at war, so you don’t have to be. Containment affords the luxury of scrutiny and manipulation, perfecting the art of pre-photography, of affective tone and resonance, of flows of weapons and media (‘Just a few atrocity photographs…’). Plenty of work for a legion of picture makers and poster boys and girls. Ballard’s protagonist, Ryan, dreams of a cease-fire, and, when this is scuppered by the ‘peace-keepers’, and he discovers the world outside the city has been at peace for decades, his dream turns to unleashing the virus upon the outside world. But Ballard’s fiction is, of course, already outpaced by reality itself. The walls came down and the virus of war was loosed some time ago. Post-ideological power — the disjunctive synthesis of Security and Terror that characterizes life today — already opened the bloodgates and transformed the world into experiment, the cosmos into laboratory of contagions. The forest. War ecology. Welcome to the Holiday Inn. Stay smart.16

Fly on the wall. Robert King is a fly on the walls of the Holiday Inn, a fly with a feeling eye. The Inn is an intersection of strands of a spider-city building webs. The operationalization of the city as designed experience commandeers powers of mediation to direct perception and capture attention. The spider creeps up on you because it left you the room to wriggle. Magic techniques of camouflage, dazzle and adjacency. This seductive web, this weird garden, is voracious but recessive, inconspicuous. The spider-city is evil media, grey, in shadow. Its power is anticipatory; in its body it already carries King’s code as its

very own potential, a likeness of his body, eye and camera. The city is inhuman. The city is a photography-trap. It makes the pictures you want to take, it lays the blood trail, and then sits and waits. It makes the world for capture. The warzone captures and devours the unwary photographer. If King’s cicerone is the devil McCullin, King is the fool who steps afterwards, carefree, into an abyss already strung with nets. You can only fall so far before you suffer forces of adhesion, before you are connected. The spider builds its web as it does for invisibility; having stolen the likeness of the photographer’s sensorium, it knows in its very body how to elude detection, how to pass itself off as Truth, as abyss, as mere spectacle of horror. And what of King? What are his chances? This is the crux — can the fool, falling, strip the city back to its larvae, the weird garden back to its roots, and map its forces in order to make his whatever weapon? Fictions of every kind. Photography at its fabulatory middle. Refrains and the noise that dissolves them. The magic formula, solve et coagula. The secret, larval compost-space of photography as oceanic, network horror of life. These are his chances. They are ours, too.17

17 Fuller and Goffey, Evil Media.